

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT: Garth Neuffer

202.470.2055

gneuffer@moroccanamericancenter.com

Friday, June 24, 2011

Moroccans Get Ready for Landmark Vote as Constitutional Reforms Win More Praise—from UN, Arab League, and Policy Experts

520 polling places opening overseas for Moroccans abroad, including 10 in US, 4 in DC area

Washington, DC (June 24)—As the historic July 1 referendum approaches, Moroccans at home and around the world are preparing to vote on far-reaching Constitutional reforms to strengthen Morocco's democratic institutions and establish it as a constitutional monarchy. Announced June 17 by His Majesty King Mohammed VI after months of input from Moroccan citizens and civil society, the reforms are continuing to win praise from world leaders and policy experts as a positive example of change in the ongoing turmoil of the Arab Spring.

In Morocco, the campaign for the referendum is already underway, with most mainstream political parties and civil society groups backing a "yes" vote on the historic reforms. To facilitate participation for registered Moroccan voters living abroad, Morocco will open more than 520 polling stations worldwide at embassies, consulates, and community centers.

Ten polling stations will be open July 1-3 in the United States—in Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Orlando, FL, and four in the Washington, DC area, including three in Virginia.

Meanwhile, recognition continues from the international community. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon welcomed the reforms and commended "the people and the Government of Morocco for the peaceful manner in which they have been conducting the national process of political reforms."

Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa praised Morocco's reforms as "an important step on the way to securing the pillars of democracy," which "we hope it will continue and deepen in the coming period." These statements of support join earlier praise from the United States, European Union, France, Britain, Spain, and Council of Europe, which made Morocco its first "partner for democracy" in the region.

Favorable reaction also continues from policy experts. "The Arab Spring has broken out in Morocco," said David B. Ottaway, Senior Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, who called the "new constitution requiring an elected rather than an appointed prime minister, the first such step in any of the eight monarchies or even most of the democratic republics of the Arab world."

Lead editorials in US newspapers have called attention to Morocco's reforms as an example for the region. "Morocco could now become a crucial theater as the Arab Spring moves toward summer," said the Washington Post. "The Moroccan reform, which will be put to a referendum on July 1... could also serve as a model for Jordan's King Abdullah II and Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, both of whom are considering similar incremental measures."

The Wall Street Journal said that while "the brightest expectations of the Arab Spring have crashed with the bloody crackdowns in Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain," the "news out of Morocco last weekend offers a timely glimmer of the potential upside in this tumultuous year." It noted Morocco's leader, "King Mohammed VI, responded to demands for democracy with political reform, not tear gas and bullets," adding "If Moroccans seize this opportunity, they could set a favorable example for the rest of North Africa and the Middle East."

In The Hill, former US Ambassador to Morocco, Edward Gabriel, said Morocco has, "taken an unprecedented step in the Arab world to advance a vision of democratic governance and social equality that others in the region would do well to emulate." He added, "The fate of these amendments is now up to the people of Morocco. But it is also now time for the US to make clear to our oldest friend and ally that we will stand behind their courageous and unprecedented effort."

**For the Full Text of His Majesty King Mohammed VI's June 17th speech, go to:
http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/main1/hm_the_king_addresse/view.**

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The Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP) is a non-profit organization whose principal mission is to inform opinion makers, government officials and interested publics in the United States about political and social developments in Morocco and the role being played by the Kingdom of Morocco in broader strategic developments in North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. For more, please visit www.moroccanamericanpolicy.org

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202.470.2055
gneuffer@moroccanaxamericancenter.com

Wednesday, June 29, 2011

Moroccans to Cast Ballots in July 1 Referendum on Constitutional Reforms, Making Historic Choice for Change with Votes, not Violence

World Leaders, Members of Congress, Experts Praise Example for Arab Spring

Washington, DC (June 29)—As the tumult of the Arab Spring turns to summer, Moroccans at home and abroad will cast their votes in a historic July 1 referendum on Constitutional reforms to strengthen Morocco's democratic institutions and establish it as a constitutional monarchy. The reforms—announced on June 17 by His Majesty King Mohammed VI after input from Moroccan citizens, civic organizations, trade unions, and political parties—have drawn international praise as a positive roadmap for the region.

Morocco's reforms are the "culmination" of decades of efforts to democratize and open its political system, said Ahmed Herzenni, President of Morocco's Advisory Council on Human Rights and a member of the Constitutional Reform Commission. Moroccans will "vote for or against these changes this Friday," he said in a forum at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Herzenni acknowledged the role of peaceful protesters in Morocco this spring, saying they "should be credited with focusing us on the need to move change forward."

Morocco is opening 520 polling stations worldwide at embassies, consulates, and other centers to allow Moroccan voters living abroad to participate. In the US, twelve polling stations will be open July 1-3—in Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Orlando, and the Washington, DC area.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL), Chairwoman of the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, is one of the Members of Congress who have voiced their support. "King Mohammed's proposed constitutional changes are a welcome start in what must be a long-term process to increase democracy and enhance stability in Morocco. I welcome proactive measures to strengthen parliament, safeguard judicial independence, promote freedom of thought, uphold human rights values, and encourage freedom of religious practice in Morocco. If adopted, expanded, and fully implemented, Morocco's reform agenda could serve as an example for the region."

Praise for the reforms has come from the United States, European Union, France, Britain, Spain, United Nations, Arab League, and Council of Europe, which recently made Morocco its first "partner for democracy." Editorials and commentaries have also been favorable, including those in the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and The Hill, as have policy experts at The Brookings Institution, Woodrow Wilson Center, and elsewhere.

Morocco's reforms are "a shining star in the Arab Spring," wrote Joel D. Hirst, International Affairs Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, in a recent Huffington Post column. "Morocco has again emerged as the leader of the Arab world," he added. "This model of Arab governance could represent the future; and the example of increasingly liberal Morocco could go a long way to convince other Middle East and North African countries to listen to their own people and adopt the gradual, peaceful reforms which will provide well-being and freedom."

Dr. J. Peter Pham, Director at The Atlantic Council's Michael S. Ansari Africa Center, said Morocco is making an "audacious bet" with its reforms, which offer "a path to the future that balances the competing demands of stability and openness to change." He added, "the United States and its European partners would do well to invest their resources, political and economic, in supporting Morocco as it undertakes the necessary—but far from risk-free—transition to a more open and democratic political process."

For the Full Text of His Majesty King Mohammed VI's June 17th speech, go to:

http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/main1/hm_the_king_addresse/view

For Answers to FAQs on Reforms in Morocco, go to:

http://www.moroccanaxamericancenter.org/upload/media/SP_Constitutional%20Reforms%20FAQ%202027June11FINAL.pdf

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Friday, July 1, 2011

MEDIA ALERT

Moroccans Cast Resounding 'Yes' Vote for Constitutional Reforms in Strong Turnout; US, Others Praise 'Important Step' for Peaceful Change

More than 70% of registered Moroccan voters participate, 'have final say' approving historic reforms

Washington, DC (July 1)—At more than 40,000 polling stations at home and abroad, Moroccans turned out in near record numbers today and cast a resounding "Yes" vote to give final approval for Constitutional reforms to strengthen Morocco's democratic institutions and establish it as a constitutional monarchy.

According to provisional results released this evening, 72 percent of Morocco's 13 million registered voters participated in the historic referendum, which took place without incident. Based on the provisional results from today's voting, it was also reported that 98 percent of those who voted supported the reforms. Moroccans abroad can cast ballots through July 3, after which the final tally will be available early next week.

The reforms—announced June 17 by His Majesty King Mohammed VI after input from Moroccan citizens, civic organizations, trade unions, and political parties—are the culmination of decades of Morocco's efforts to democratize and open its political system, and have won international praise as a roadmap for the region.

"We welcome the referendum as an important step in Morocco's ongoing democratic development," said US State Department spokesman Mark Toner. "In this period of profound change, we think it's important and we congratulate the people of Morocco and their leadership for the peaceful referendum." Spain also praised Morocco's vote today, offering its "unfailing support" as Moroccans continued "consolidating democracy."

For Answers to FAQs on Reforms in Morocco, go to:

http://www.moroccanamericanpolicy.org/upload/media/SP_Constitutional%20Reforms%20FAQ%2027Jun_e11FINAL.pdf

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FAQ: Reforms in Morocco

**Moroccan People to Vote on Constitutional Referendum;
"Yes" Vote Giant Step towards Constitutional Monarchy
Moroccan people 'will have final say' in July 1 national referendum**

OVERVIEW

For more than a decade, Morocco has been moving incrementally towards greater reform and democratic change. Beginning with the appointment of an opposition leader as Prime Minister in 1998, to the enactment of their historic family law in 2004 that greatly enhanced women's rights and lead to the establishment of the *mourchidates* program (women religious counselors working in mosques and community centers), to revisions to the political parties and media codes, as well as holding elections deemed "free and fair" by the international community, Morocco is no stranger to the call of the Arab Spring.

On June 17, 2011, after over a decade of discussion, debate, and reforms, the King of Morocco proposed that political and social change be accelerated through the adoption of a series of constitutional amendments that will establish a constitutional monarchy with separation of powers, enhanced responsibilities for local and regional governments, and clear support for the multicultural, multi-religious character of Moroccan society. The people of Morocco will vote to accept or reject the proposed amendments in a referendum on July 1. This will be the first chance for a nation in the region to transition from the Arab Spring to an Arab Summer.

The referendum gives the Moroccan people the opportunity to take charge of their political futures by validating changes that will:

- Clearly establish that the Head of Government (Prime Minister) will be appointed from the party with the highest number of votes in the popular election.
- Reduce the King's executive prerogatives to appointments in consultation with or upon the recommendation of the Head of Government, as in other constitutional monarchies.
- Further empower the Parliament with broad legislative powers.
- Include recognition of Morocco's cultural identity of diverse ethnicities, religions, languages, and traditions.
- Restate emphatically Morocco's commitment to equality of all its citizens, the protection of human and civil rights, equal protection before the law, and other guarantees.

**For the Full Text of His Majesty King Mohammed VI's June 17th speech, go to:
http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/main1/hm_the_king_addresse/view.**

International Support for Constitutional Reforms

- The US Department of State said it is "encouraged by the proposals put forward by the king to transform Morocco's democratic development through constitutional, judicial, and political reforms." The European Union called the reforms "a major step" signaling "a clear commitment to democracy and respect for human rights." It added that new measures would continue "the Kingdom's already-launched reform process" and advance the "separation of powers," "independence of the judiciary," "regionalization," and "equal rights for men and women."
- French President Nicolas Sarkozy said the advances were "exemplary," and put Morocco on "a path of profound, peaceful, and modern transformation." Britain welcomed Morocco's "commitment to reform" and Spain also congratulated the Moroccan leader. The 47-member Council of Europe went so far as to make Morocco its first "partner for democracy" among nations in the region.
- United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon welcomed the Constitutional reform, commended "the people and the Government of Morocco for the peaceful manner in which they have been conducting the national process of political reforms." Arab League Secretary General, Amr Moussa, praised Morocco's reforms as "an important step on the way to securing the pillars of democracy," which "we hope it will continue and deepen in the coming period."
- Policy experts and leading newspapers agree. "What's so important about what the Moroccan King has done is that he is forging a different model of change in the Arab world," said Kenneth M. Pollack, Director, Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution. If Morocco continues the "bold vision" of its "quiet revolution," Pollack said, "it will be the model of what meaningful, gradual, peaceful change in the Arab world could and should look like" and "transform not just Morocco, but the entire region."
- Dr. J. Peter Pham, Director, Michael S. Ansari Africa Center, The Atlantic Council said that the path Morocco is choosing "sets an example in terms of reforms that pay heed to history, religion and culture," and would resonate across the MENA region.
- "The Arab Spring has broken out in Morocco," said David B. Ottaway, Senior Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, who called the "new constitution requiring an elected rather than an appointed prime minister, the first such step in any of the eight monarchies or even most of the democratic republics of the Arab world."
- While "the brightest expectations of the Arab Spring have crashed with the bloody crackdowns in Libya, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain," said The Wall Street Journal, "the news out of Morocco last weekend offers a timely glimmer of the potential upside in this tumultuous year." "King Mohammed VI, responded to demands for democracy with political reform, not tear gas and bullets" and "If Moroccans seize this opportunity, they could set a favorable example for the rest of North Africa and the Middle East."
- "Morocco could now become a crucial theater as the Arab Spring moves toward summer," said the Washington Post. "The Moroccan reform, which will be put to a referendum on July 1...could also serve as a model for Jordan's King Abdullah II and Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, both of whom are considering similar incremental measures."

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Happening in Morocco?

Constitutional reform in Morocco is a process that has been moving forward for more than two decades. Specific reforms have been driven by two major factors: the vision of the King's leadership and changes in the environment that require a redefinition of forms of governance and relations between citizens and the government.

The amendments to be voted on July 1st will take Morocco from an "executive King" form of government to a "citizen King" who shares powers with an executive Head of Government representing the largest party in Parliament, and a Parliament that has the primary legislative role in the government. A separate and independent Judiciary backed up by processes and institutions that promote transparency, respect for civil and human rights, and equality across the diversity of the country being formally enshrined in the Moroccan Constitution, are prominent outcomes of the proposed changes. In addition, specific "rights" and "guarantees" will ensure that individual citizens have the protections and opportunities to have a government that is accountable for its actions and transparent in its dealings.

What Does it Mean?

The adoption of these amendments defines Morocco as a constitutional monarchy wherein the Monarch, as Head of State, has specific roles and responsibilities that are distinct from those of the Head of Government. With the enhanced powers to the Parliament, a separate and independent Judiciary and related institutions, and the explicit demarcation of people's rights, the concrete road to democratic governance and balance of powers has been firmly laid. How far and how quickly Morocco travels that path will be affected by many factors, not the least of which is the commitment by Moroccan civil society, political parties, politicians, the private sector, and others to taking full advantage of the opportunities that these amendments hold.

This form of government draws from multiple experiences: in the UK and Spain there is a royal Head of State; likewise, in France and other countries, there is a distinction between the functions of the Head of State and the Head of Government. How Morocco implements its changes will in large part reflect lessons learned and future opportunities that emerge from the Moroccan experience going forward.

Why is this Important?

This is occurring at a time when the region is in turmoil and there is great uncertainty. Unlike Egypt, which has voted on very narrow changes to its Constitution, and Tunisia, which must make a full overhaul of its Constitution, Morocco has a Constitution that has evolved to meet the needs of the people as they become more familiar with and more confident in their ability to exercise their rights and duties as citizens.

These proposed changes will lay the foundation for a dynamic, responsible government, capable of responding to and initiating actions that address the many challenges of governing in a complex society. And it should be expected that there will be more proposed changes in the future as Morocco learns from implementing these amendments and Moroccans take more and more control of their futures.

What is Morocco's track record on reforms prior to the constitutional changes announced by King Mohammed VI on June 17?

As with any leader, and more so with a King with religious and political responsibilities, the basis for leadership is the trust built with the people. King Mohammed VI is well aware that his reign is different from that of his father, and that is why he chose to build on earlier reforms, generate supporting coalitions, and define new directions for Morocco. Among the most notable aspects already in place before the 2011 constitutional reforms:

- National and local elections recognized by international observers as free and fair.
- A thorough reform of the family law that granted women equal standing before the law in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other important measures that contribute to women's rights.
- The completion of an Equity and Reconciliation Commission, including public and televised hearings, into past human rights abuses in the country wherein the State recognized its responsibilities and has compensated victims of abuse.
- The establishment of independent human rights institutions to promote respect for human rights and the rule of law and to investigate allegations of abuse, which has drawn recognition from the US and the EU.
- Funding programs such as the National Human Development Initiative to improve the quality of life and economic opportunities for Morocco's most disadvantaged urban and rural populations.
- Housing programs designed to eliminate shanty towns by 2015.
- Increased funding for women's education, especially young girls in rural areas.
- Revised commercial codes and procedures to attract foreign direct investment to provide jobs for young Moroccans.

What is the February 20 movement?

Feb 20 began as a core group of young people concerned with jobs, transparency, and power sharing, who motivated others to join, including trade unions, academics, and people from all strata of society. While their agenda reflects many of the concerns of the Moroccan people, there is no consensus around a preferred set of solutions. And there are signs that the organizers have steadily lost ground to better organized Islamists and leftists with far more radical goals that were not part of the original Feb 20 demands.

What are the key proposed amendments to the Moroccan constitution with respect to the separation of government powers? What powers remain vested in the King? Will he have any role in the legislative process?

The King was the "chief executive" of the government and appointed the key members of the judiciary, influenced the choice of government ministers, and provided guidance for major policy decisions. Parliament could review and discuss laws but could not unilaterally amend them. Under the proposed amendments, that would change.

- A strong Parliament will exercise legislative powers, enact laws, control the Government, and assess public policies.
- Effective parliamentary control mechanisms will include motion of censure, committees of inquiry, referral to the Constitutional Court, convening of special sessions.
- The Prime Minister is replaced by a Head of Government, appointed from the party that wins the general election.
- The Head of Government is answerable only to the Parliament.
- The Head of Government has extensive powers, leads the cabinet, manages the administration, and enjoys extensive prerogatives in the appointment of senior civil servants.
- The Head of Government can dissolve Parliament; the King may also dissolve Parliament after consultation with Head of Government.
- The King retains control over national security and religious affairs through newly established National Councils that include appointments by the King and representation by the Head of Government.

What are the primary proposed amendments to the Moroccan constitution with respect to freedoms and human rights? What steps are being taken to ensure the independence of the Judiciary?

The protection of human and civil rights has become the major issue linking all the various political and advocacy groups in the Kingdom. Closely tied to this is the need for an independent Judiciary which is insulated from external influences and intimidation, and is maintained by professional members who are well-trained for their responsibilities. With the creation of an independent National Human Rights Commission earlier this year and the strengthening of the Anti-Corruption Agency, Morocco had already taken key steps to greatly improve human and civil rights protections. The proposed changes continue this progress.

Human Rights

- Prohibition of all forms of discrimination on the basis of sex, color, creed, culture, social or regional background, language, or disability.
- Morocco ratifies the primacy of international conventions concerned with human rights and the rights of women and children.
- Sets up of an Authority for the achievement of gender parity and the fight against all forms of discrimination.
- Legislation to be enacted that implements affirmative action measures to encourage access to elected office for women.

Judicial Independence

- The Judiciary becomes an independent power, ensuring genuine protection of rights and guaranteeing compliance with the law.
- Prohibition of interference or any kind of pressure on the work of judges.

- Status of judges reinforced by an organic law that establishes the principles of an independent judiciary.
- Establishes a transparent Constitutional Court with power to check the constitutionality of legislation.
- Any citizen can bring a Constitutional challenge.

The King appointed a commission of experts who advised on the Constitutional reforms. Who were the individuals appointed to this commission? Who did they consult during the process?

The Commission was made up of scholars, experts, members of political organizations, and those with experience in Constitutional reform. Consultations were extensively conducted by the Commission and included political parties, labor organizations, human rights NGOs, women's advocacy groups, youth organizations, lawyers associations, and employers' associations, and were also open to public comment and recommendations through a widely publicized webpage designed to allow individuals to contribute to the process www.reforme.ma.

Some critics have argued that elected representatives of the Moroccan people should have drafted the amendments to the constitution. Why were popularly elected representatives not tasked with amending the constitution?

It is not unusual for a council of experts to work on a draft for a new constitution. This is regular practice in many countries around the world. Elected representatives were consulted during the drafting process. What is fundamentally important is that the people of Morocco be given the opportunity to pass judgment on the outcome through a popular vote on whether to accept the proposals. As King Mohammed VI made clear in his speech March 9, it is the people of Morocco who will "have the final say."

Do you believe that Moroccan citizens will notice a practical difference in the way they are governed and the way they live their lives over the coming years as a result of these amendments? In what way?

The impact will be felt on several levels including:

- Locally, the central government will cede significant power to locally elected officials and representatives directly elected by the people.
- Local, regional, and national courts will have extensive latitude to rule on cases brought by citizens including issues of human rights abuses; whistleblowers will be protected under new statutes for the anti-corruption programs; and access to attorneys and protections against police abuse are also strengthened.

What has been the reaction of the Moroccan people to the proposed constitutional amendments?

While the vast majority of Moroccans have been overwhelmingly positive, some objections have been raised concerning the speed of the ratification process, the desire for more amendments, and other issues. The basic questions regarding the proposed amendments are how far, how fast? Many former critics have said that they were surprised at how far King Mohammed VI was prepared to go at this time to strengthen the nation's commitment to democratic rule and social equality. Others are concerned that implementation will undercut the spirit of the amendments.

This is where the United States can play an important role, by supporting the reform process, keeping abreast of developments, offering technical expertise, and continuing to expand pro-democracy and economic growth programs with Morocco.

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202.470.2055

gneuffer@moroccanaxamericancenter.com

Monday, July 4, 2011

King Mohammed VI Sends Message to President Obama as US, EU, France, and Spain Praise Historic Morocco Vote, Support Democratic Reforms Promoting Rights and Rule of Law

Vote Breakout Shows Strong Turnout in Regions Across Morocco

Washington, DC (July 4)—As praise from world leaders continues for Morocco's historic July 1 vote approving its Constitutional reforms, His Majesty King Mohammed VI sent a message to President Barack Obama expressing July 4th congratulations and pride in the 'long-standing friendship' and 'strategic partnership' that has defined the two nations' relations for more than two centuries. In 1777, Morocco was the first nation to recognize US independence and in 1787 it signed America's longest "Treaty of Friendship and Peace."

In his message, King Mohammed VI reiterated "the strong commitment of Morocco to the principles of democracy" and "the fight against all forms of extremism" and "violence," as well as supporting the "values of tolerance" the two nations share. He noted "the permanent consultation and coordination between the two countries" and Morocco's continued support for US initiatives "to achieve peace and stability in the world and bring just and peaceful solutions to long-lasting conflicts, notably in the Middle East and Africa."

The King's message comes as final votes cast yesterday by voters living abroad indicated that more than 73 percent of Morocco's 13 million registered voters turned out for the referendum on Morocco's landmark reforms to strengthen its democratic institutions and establish it as a Constitutional monarchy.

According to provisional results, 98 percent of those voting approved the reforms. It is significant that regional voter breakouts show broad support across Morocco, with turnout exceeding 80 percent in six of 16 voting regions, highest in the three southernmost provinces that are part of the Western Sahara.

"The United States welcomes Morocco's July 1 constitutional referendum," said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. She added, "We support the Moroccan people and leaders in their efforts to strengthen the rule of law, raise human rights standards, promote good governance, and work toward long-term democratic reform that incorporates checks and balances. We look forward to the full implementation of the new constitution as a step toward the fulfillment of the aspirations and rights of all Moroccans."

The European Union praised "the positive outcome of the referendum" on Constitutional reforms and pledged to "fully support Morocco" in its implementation. EU leadership called Morocco's reforms "important commitments to enhancing democracy and respect for human rights, strengthening separation of powers" with a stronger parliament and independent judiciary, and "advancing regionalization" and "gender equality."

French President Nicolas Sarkozy committed "France's full support for the exemplary process through which Morocco is resolutely and peacefully pursuing its deepening of democracy." Foreign Minister Alain Juppe called the vote a "clear and historic decision," saying "Morocco has succeeded in four months, peacefully and with dialogue, to take a decisive step," in contrast with a region shaken by "confrontation, sometimes violent." Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero also hailed Morocco's vote, saying "The commitment shown by His Majesty to bring about these changes is becoming a reference point for many other countries."

For Map of Morocco Referendum Voter Turnout by Region, go to:

<http://www.moroccanaxamericanpolicy.org/upload/media/Morocco%20Voter%20Turnout%20by%20Region%207-1-11.pdf>

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